

The Place of Bibliotherapy in a Hospital

● By SADIE PETERSON-DELANEY

BOOKS, like medicine, have a definite effect on the physical, mental and moral welfare of those who are unfortunately handicapped by illness.

Bibliotherapy means the treatment of a patient through selective reading. A brief record of the patient's diagnosis, treatment and prognosis is furnished the librarian, who, having more than the layman's knowledge of the more common cases, selects the books for the individual which will give him not only knowledge and entertainment, but stimulation toward the development of a wholesome interest in subjects which will relieve his mind from his malady and worries. What is good for one person might be detrimental to another, therefore, this careful and intelligent selection of reading matter for each individual is of great importance.

The library then has become a laboratory and a work shop for those interested in the improvement and development of the whole individual. Here, minds long imprisoned in lethargy are awakened. This has been evident at the hospital library of the Veterans' Administration Facility, Tuskegee, Alabama for fourteen years.

The atmosphere of the library is conducive to reading. It's green walls, are hung with maps, paintings and pictures of Negro leaders and authors of books as well as other outstanding persons who have attained great heights through books.

There are nearly 6,000 volumes in the general collection, and a separate collection of books by and about the Negro. Throngs of readers use the library daily and their requests for reference and research material equal that of a public library. Many choose a vocation or a hobby through books and some complete their educational preparation through the library.

The Bibliotherapy unit is composed of the mental patients who come from the closed wards daily, with an attendant, to the library. Here they are aided in the development of their dormant qualities through books, and are given individual attention and sympathetic direction.

The librarian is guided by the ward surgeon, through the information he has gathered from the patient's diagnosis, and the patient's progress or reaction to reading is noted.

Sometimes a musician or an artist, an inventor, or a craftsman in trades discovers absorbing material on the theme of his art, his

To our readers we here present the story of the work of a Negro woman which is attracting the attention of library authorities throughout America. Creating techniques and methods herself, Mrs. Delaney has developed bibliotherapy at Tuskegee with great originality and effectiveness.

invention or his trade. Through the clipping and binding services of this department, a reading interest is created by the making of scrap books on various subjects and these are used in their discussions of current events. At first, the reading and collection of such material may be a hobby with the patient. Usually, it becomes a serious and steady business with him as the urge awakens within him to return his energies to the perfecting of his former interest, and once again he is alive with the enthusiasm and joy derived from activity. The satisfaction he realizes from being supplied with ample material, both old and new, is evidenced by his testimonials, his obvious improvement mentally and spiritually, and the doctors' reports of steps towards recovery.

The library service to the bed patients is most important. This consists of the librarian's daily visits to the bedsides on the various wards with a library book cart filled with carefully selected reading material and pictures. This gives the patient who must spend long hours in



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bed, an opportunity through books, to build up hope, relieve his mental tension, absorb his worries and alleviate his pain. Reading interest awakened in a bed patient, often stays with the patient during his entire period of hospitalization.

Reading interest is aroused in the new patient entering the hospital through personal contact by the librarian and the circulation of book lists and compiled pamphlets. Weekly radio talks by the librarian, suggested books and synopses, as well as talks on the wards, keep the patients informed. The library activities have done much in establishing self-confidence, in affording an outlet to the patient who has previously felt himself inadequate.

As the restless patient becomes absorbed in newspapers, magazines, and library activities, he becomes more calm, the introvert becomes communicative, the grandiose finds an outlet, the depressed finds an incentive to live, and many become leaders and public speakers, returning to their communities as useful citizens. In many cases they organize press clubs at home.

In the library press club a weekly Monday morning meeting is held where patients review books they have read, to their comrades. In the Thursday evening meetings of this same club, they select a speaker from among their number who often gains the respect of his audience and develops a certain pride of achievement.

The philatelic (stamp) club stimulates interest in books of travel, history, and literature. It also creates stamp collectors who become absorbed in this worth while hobby.

The library debate club (the patients' forum) encourages discussion. A great deal of reading is done by patients in their efforts to prepare for their subjects and before the current topic is closed they are seeking information for another.

The library department for the blind has brought light to men who have been shut out by darkness and has given them a desire to take an active part in life. They are taught "Standard Braille" by the librarian and they are able to keep abreast through current magazines and books in Braille. Talking Books are



Art Exhibit by a Mental Patient of the Bibliotherapy Group in the Library.

supplied. These, they enjoy in the library and on their wards. Through Braille book lists they are given a chance to make a selection of books such as, *Hitting the Dark Trail*—Hawkes; *North to the Orient*—Lindbergh; *Anne Sullivan Macy*, *The Life Behind Helen Keller*—Braddy; *Cappy Ricks*—Kyne; *Short History of the World*—Wells; Shakespeare's plays and many other eminent authors' books.

The titles in Braille on the Talking Book Records bring great satisfaction to the blind reader in making his selection. These books, they review weekly in the library causing the sighted reader to become so interested that they request the same books. Each afternoon the blind patients come in groups to the library and enjoy competitive reading in Braille. They give sentences in "Oral Braille" in history and philosophy, Braille having been made a language in these departments as well as a text. New men are continually being added to this group and are taught Braille. Most of these blind patients are mental cases who, through this therapy, are conquering their mental handicap. The deteriorated blind are cheered and soothed by the Talking Books which are taken to them on their wards and quite often a regressed patient requests the title of some book he has heard previously.

There is a Medical Library, which is accessible to the Medical Staff only, containing nearly 500 volumes and a large number of Medical Journals for research and reference.

The World War left a vast number of men broken in body and spirit and suffering from various disabilities. Some must put in long

periods of hospitalization and in an effort to aid in their recovery, the Veterans' Administration Hospital Libraries bridge the gap between the hospital and the outside world; aiding them in their adjustment to present conditions and fostering hope for a future. Some interesting examples are cited:

(A) Surgical case. This patient was obliged to lie in one position for long periods and had the use of only one arm. He was very discouraged about his condition and became a chronic complainer. He was finally persuaded, by the librarian, to read books. He soon became interested in such books as, *Ask Me Another* Spafford and Esty, *Five Thousand New Answers to Questions* Haskin. Soon he took delight in encouraging other patients who visited him. He read all current magazines and *The Negro In Our History* Woodson. He was gratified at being so popular and became optimistic and cheerful. He was given a book review and is now among the best informed patients on his ward. He is greatly improved and cooperative.

(B) Mental case. This man was uncommunicative; was almost mute. It was difficult to have him respond, even to questioning. He sat and stared blankly, dully. He was brought to the library with the Bibliotherapy group each day. He was given books of poetry to read. Later he began copying poems. Daily, poems were selected from his copies for circulation to bed patients. He was given selected editorials and essays to read at each Library Press Club Meeting. This gave him a chance to talk. Also he would read aloud to other patients. Gradu-

ally, by reading aloud, he has become communicative for periods and it is felt that with continued treatment, he may become normal.

(C) Mental case. This patient was deteriorated. He was at last brought to the library with the Bibliotherapy group. It was found that he had previously had some training in art. He was given drawing ink and books with photographs of artists. He became calm and subdued and not only made reproductions but steadily improved them greatly. He improved daily in drawing and reading. He requested information on all he was copying. Later he was given oils and painted pictures of Sir Galahad and Pushkin and Lord Byron. He prepares for an art exhibit held in the library annually.

(D) Mental case. This patient was paroled to the library. He had a fair educational background. An effort was made to aid him in view of his weakness. He became interested in the clipping service and collected valuable articles on many subjects. He read extensively and attended the library daily. After ground parole he continued his interest. He read *Habits That Handicap - Towns; He Can Who Thinks He Can -* and *Everybody Ahead -* Marden, along with biographies of men who have succeeded. He began to gain the confidence of his associates. He assisted his daughter in the preparation of her valedictory for graduation, with material he read in the library. He improved rapidly and was discharged. It was reported that he has become a community leader and has adjusted himself satisfactorily.

(E) Mental case. This patient was paroled to the library; he was found to have had a splendid educational background, but was apathetic and discouraged at first. He soon began to take interest in the library. He improved gradually and became a zealous reader. Finally he asked to be given some library training. He assisted in library desk work. This gave him great pride in his accomplishments. His ward surgeon noticed his rapid improvement. He participated in the Library Debate Club, also the Press Club. His interest in books seemed to lead him to a new world.



Teaching Braille to the Blind

Home difficulties arose but his interest in books seemed to fortify him. He has been giving his entire day at the library and is an asset. He is composed, interested in his personal appearance and hopes to secure enough training to become an assistant in some library.

(F) This patient (mental case) because of family difficulties, had become bitter toward life and anti-socially inclined. He had been a practicing physician. He was given parole to the library. The librarian interested him in reading. He first read, *A Fortune to Share* and *Let's Start Over Again*—Young. He used these books at the library Press Club Meetings. He soon found great interest in reading and requested each time to review his books to the patient group. He is so influential with the patients, that he serves in an official capacity with them. He is now accountable and makes excellent talks in the library to patient groups in their library meetings, and in Saturday Debates, assisting in the selection of reference material. His entire personality has changed. He sent book lists and reviews to his family and through this interest a family adjustment has been brought about. This serves to extend new ways to him for his future. He is allowed time daily to study and soon hopes to be given trial furlough to make plans to resume his practice.

(G) General Ward case. Wheel-chair case. This patient was a bed patient for a long period and then progressed to a wheel chair. His chro-

nic condition made him despondent at first. He became interested in reading and read on the average of a book a day and kept abreast through many newspapers and magazines. He soon began to give reviews of his books to his ward mates and recommended to them the books he had read. This gave him such prestige with his associates that he lost sight of his condition. Although it seems that he will always be incapacitated, he looks forward to being a bookshop owner when discharged.

Thus the library has proven a factor in the Medical Service of hospitals and is classed as an effective therapeutic measure in the rehabilitation of all types of patients.

It is true that, as David Grayson says in his interesting book *Adventures in Solitude*, many people never have leisure to read until a period of hospitalization is necessary.

Well chosen books ameliorate disturbing thoughts, as well as tend to soothe and build up hope, and the hospitalized veteran benefits from this valuable therapy.

Few people, even veterans, realize the haunting tragedy of scores of men, once young, ambitious, and physically and mentally fit, who came back from the World War pitiable shadows of their former selves.

The Veterans Hospitals are playing a tremendous part in rehabilitating these men and in that process the Bibliotherapy unit has been found to be invaluable.

THE DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
of the

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MARCH 20—27, 1938

The campaign is designed to interest young people and to direct their attention to vocational and educational questions. It will be observed in high schools and colleges, and by other groups close to the problems of young people.

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